

### God is Love part 3 – Assurance of eternal life

Scripture references from the ESV

**I John 4: 7-21** <sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. <sup>15</sup> Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. <sup>16</sup> So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. <sup>17</sup> By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot<sup>[a]</sup> love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

We face tests of many kinds throughout life, but the most important test we need to apply is that of whether we have eternal life. That test involves these questions:

- Am I born again?
- Do I truly belong to God?
- Is Jesus really my Saviour from sin and death?

Nothing is more important to know in life than the result of this test. John wrote his first letter so that believers might have assurance of eternal life (**5:13** see p4).

In this series, we have already seen that **God is love**. His essential nature is love and this love has existed forever within God as Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit). It overflows to us as God created us to enjoy him and his love, and saved us from sin when we turned away from him, so that we could enjoy him and his love again. This is the love of relationship and God removes our sin from us so that we can enjoy the same relationship of love that is enjoyed within the Trinity. God places us in his Son so that we can be where he is – in the lap of the Father, enjoying the love of the Father.

The outcome of this experience of God's love is that we shall love God and love his people. As God's love within himself overflows to us, so God's love in us will overflow to others.

- John has told us all this because he wants us to know with certainty that we have eternal life.

Yet how can we know that we have a relationship with God when we cannot see him (**v12a** above)? John goes on (**v12b** above) to say that we can know this when we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, and then amplifies this in **vv 13-16** (above).

A saving relationship with God is an intimate relationship whereby God abides in us and we abide in him.

- God lives in those who really know him and those who really know him live in him.

Jesus tells us: **this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)** ). We can be sure that God abides in us, and we in him, because God has given us the Spirit (**v12** above), and it is the witness of the Spirit who assures us that we have eternal life. This witness of the Spirit is evidenced in us through faith and love - the confession of Christ and abiding in God's love.

How we answer the following three questions will show what is in our hearts and whether we have eternal life.

#### 1. Are we aware of the witness of God's Spirit? (**v13** above)

John has already spoken of this in **ch3:23-24** (see p4). True religion is not just faith in a Christian creed, or moral obedience to God's commands or an emotional response to Jesus. It is about having the life of God in us (see ref p4).

A Christian is a person who has been born again by the Spirit of God. God has come by his Spirit and broken down the walls of hostility, invading their heart and ruling as King. None of this is about you or me, but it is all about God and for his glory. That person will go on to know the work of God's Spirit in their life. This is an ongoing daily experience, and it is an act of God's love. (**Romans 5:5** see p4)

**One of the ways God loves us is by giving us his Spirit.**

It is an act of his love because it brings us to know God's love personally. We know him

- At work in us to change us
- To be the God who is love
- To be our Saviour from sin

**Supremely we know God to be our loving heavenly Father (Ro 8:15-16 see p4).**

When the God of heaven comes to dwell in our hearts by his Spirit, everything changes. We come to see God the Father as a loving Father, not an angry tyrant. It changes our understanding of who Jesus is, bringing us to the second question.

- 2. Are we joyfully confessing Christ? (v15 above).** John is drawing our attention to everything that the Bible has to say about Jesus. This follows from John being able to testify, with the other apostles, that Jesus was sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world (v14 above). The apostles witnessed the life of Jesus on earth 2000 years ago. They could testify to his miracles, his teaching, his death and his rising to life in a resurrected body. The apostles were taught by the Spirit of God and wrote down what they saw in the New Testament, explaining the reason Jesus lived, died and rose to life.

Where there is the witness of God's Spirit through the New Birth and the witness of the apostles in the written word of God (the Bible), there will be faith in Jesus Christ (the Son of God who is God) which will be publicly confessed. That faith rests in the truth that God is Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons in the unity of one God.

- Where there is that public confession of faith in Christ, the Spirit of God has been at work and you can be sure you are abiding in God and he is abiding in you. (**Romans 10:9** see p4)

However, this confession of faith in Christ is more than just intellectual agreement with the facts about Jesus or some Christian creed. Though the Holy Spirit does inform our minds, that is not all he does. He also works at the level of our hearts, producing love in our heart for God. Any confession of God that does not lead to love for Christ is just intellectualism and is not a saving confession.

**A saving confession of faith is also a confession of love, joy and delight in Jesus.**

- It is a confession that doesn't give up when following Jesus becomes hard
- It is a confession that leads to obedience to the commands of Jesus

**A person who has the Spirit of God abiding in them is a person who understands the truth about Jesus.**

- 3. Are we abiding in God's love? (v16 above).** When the Spirit of God is at work in us, he leads us to know and believe the love God has for us and then we **WILL** abide in it. That will be evidence that God abides in us and we abide in him.

What does that look like in our lives? When John writes about the love God has for us, he means more than the love that is shown **towards** us. God has loved us and has shown his love towards us in rescuing us from sin and judgement (**vv9-10** above), but John also means the love that God **puts in us** through the work of his Spirit in our hearts. That love becomes a power at work in us, so that we love as God loves. To abide in love means:

**to abide in God's love which is at work in us.**

This shows itself when:

### **We love the things that God loves**

- What does God love?
- a) **God loves his Son.** (Mark 1:11 see p4). If God's love is in us and we are abiding in that love, then we will love Jesus and delight in him as the Father does. Jesus himself prayed that for us. (John 17: 20-26 p4).
- b) **God loves his Word.** If God's love is in us and we are abiding in that love, then we will love the Bible. We will want to read the Bible because it is in the Bible that we meet with God.
- c) **God loves his people.** If God's love is in us and we are abiding in that love, then we will love the church and will make it a priority to meet with our brothers and sisters and to serve them.

The initial three questions are the most important questions we will ever have to answer:

1. **Are we aware of the witness of God's Spirit?**
2. **Are we joyfully confessing Christ?**
3. **Are we abiding in God's love?**

You might answer them in one of two ways.

#### **1) These three things are true for me but not perfectly. Does that mean I don't have eternal life?**

You may be able to say that you are aware of the witness of God's Spirit and that is evidenced in your life by a confession of faith in Christ that comes from a heart of love for him, and by abiding in God's love by loving Jesus, the Bible and the Church.

- Yet you feel that you still have a long way to go. That is normal Christianity, this side of heaven.

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he said to them that he could know they had eternal life because their love and faith were evident. (1 Thess 1:2-5 see p4). However, it seems he was still praying that their faith and love would grow more and more because later he wrote to them thanking God that their faith was growing abundantly and their love for one another was increasing. (2 Thess 1:3 see p4).

You may not be trusting and loving perfectly, but where there is increasing faith and love, you can have confidence that God abides in you, and you in him. Ask yourself:

- Have I grown in my love for Christ, his word and his people over the time since I first confessed him?
- Do I know more of the love of God the Father than I did when I first experienced his love?

Maybe your answer is...

#### **2) None of this is true for me, so how can I have eternal life?**

The first piece of good news for you is that you have found out that you don't have eternal life before it's too late. The second piece of good news is that you have now been confronted with the God who is love. Out of love for you, he invites you to come to himself, to enjoy him and his love. The greatest barrier between you and God has been removed through the death of Jesus. Your sin, which excluded you from his holy presence, has been punished in Christ. You do not need to be afraid to come to him, however sinful you feel. He welcomes sinners who come confessing their sin and need of Christ.

**Come to him and experience his love poured into your heart through his own Spirit.**

**All you need to do is come into his arms of love, confessing that you are a sinner and Christ is your Saviour.**

**Trust in him to accept you.**

**1 John 5:13** I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

**1 John 3:23-24** And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. <sup>24</sup>Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God,<sup>[d]</sup> and God<sup>[e]</sup> in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

**Book reference:** Henry Scougal – The life of God in the soul of man.

**Romans 5:5** God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

**Romans 8:15-16** For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God

**Romans 10:9** because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved

**Mark 1:11** And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son,<sup>[d]</sup> with you I am well pleased."

**John 17: 20-26** "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup>that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup>The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. <sup>24</sup>Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. <sup>25</sup>O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup>I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

**1 Thess 1:2-5** We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly<sup>[a]</sup> mentioning you in our prayers, <sup>3</sup>remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>For we know, brothers<sup>[b]</sup> loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup>because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction

**2 Thess 1:3** We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers,<sup>[a]</sup> as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.